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OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 November 1958

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Prospects in Libya\*

1. The prospects for the Western position in Libya have .. deteriorated seriously during the past few months. Many Libyans identify their interests and their future with Nasser and his neutralist policies though they may have no desire to join the UAR. Egyptian propaganda and subversion, with Soviet assistance, have made significant progress not only among the general public, but also among persons of standing and authority. One result has already been to increase pressure against King Idriss' policy of permitting Western bases in Libya. But there are other dangers of a serious deterioration in the authority of the central government, of a coup against the central government inspired by the Egyptians, or the emergence of an anti-Western regime following the death of the aging and infirm King.

\* This memorandum has been discussed with representatives of OCI and DD/P.

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2. The situation in Libya is complicated by the artificiality of the state. Its people have no feeling for the nation, they are divided on tribal and geographical lines, and have little faith in the future of their country. The King is the only symbol of national and religious unity, but he is diffident and inactive. If the Crown Prince, his nephew, were to be built up over a period of time as the successor to the throne and if he succeeded in winning public respect, he might be able to take the present King's place. In order to make the transition safely, however, it would probably be necessary for the King to transfer the office during his lifetime and to remain at least partially active in the government for a year or so afterward. If the King were to die, however, or be removed from the scene without having made some such provision for the successful transfer of the Crown, Libya as presently constituted might collapse.

3. In such a situation, the Egyptians and their agents and friends would probably assert their influence in the towns and among the tribes. The federal government would probably quite quickly lose control, leaving the responsibility for exercise of authority to provincial governments. Some provincial government officials would probably be fairly effective, for a time at least. The security forces, including the Army, would be torn

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by the same rivalries as the country at large and would be unlikely to function effectively. In these circumstances, the Egyptians would probably be able to set up a nationalist government which would have the support, if it could not command the obedience, of the majority. Another possibility is that the Egyptians could establish a government by a coup at the time of the death of the King.

4. However, the Egyptians may not wait for the King's death. They have had considerable success in subverting civilian and security officials and may believe that they are now in a position to topple the government. For the moment they probably are restrained by the presence of UK troops and the possibility of a rapid US intervention. Sooner or later, however, Nasser is likely to encourage a move directed at the establishment of a government committed to pro-UAR, neutralist policies.

5. We do not believe that there is any anti-UAR group in Libya which, after the King's death or removal from office by an Egyptian-led coup, could gain control of the country without outside help. Diplomatic and financial assistance from the West would not alone be likely to provide sufficient strength to enable

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a regime willing to cooperate with the West to survive. The British forces in Tobruk could be used to maintain order wherever they were deployed, but it would take a substantially larger number of Western troops to establish control of the coastal areas, including all the main centers. We believe that the King and some members of the government would be likely - if they had the time - to request intervention by British and American troops in the event of an attempt against the regime.

6. Soviet objectives in Libya, as in other parts of the Arab area, have run parallel with those of the Egyptians and the radical Arab nationalists. In Libya there appears to have been more direct cooperation between Soviet and Egyptian personnel in subversive activity and political action than elsewhere. We believe, however, that Libya has been a target of opportunity for the Soviets which American and British military installations have made of particular interest. Nevertheless, we believe that in the event of Western intervention the Soviets would react in much the same manner as they did to the US and UK landings in Lebanon and Jordan. They would probably confine their reaction to propaganda activities and would seek to use the situation to condemn the Western Powers as imperialists and to identify the Soviet Union as the ally of Arab nationalism.

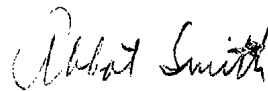
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7. In the meantime, and even assuming a continuation of King Idriss in power, the prospects for improvements in relations with the West are uncertain. Prime Minister Kubber is currently engaged in opening maneuvers in a campaign to get more money from the US. Part of his game will probably involve approaches to the Soviet Bloc and the Egyptians. An increase in US assistance to Libya would probably stabilize the position of the present government, but only for a time. Anti-Western feeling will persist and the Egyptians and Soviets will continue to focus them upon the Western military base issue. Regardless of the government in office, pressures upon the US and UK positions will increase.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:



ABBOT SMITH  
Acting Chairman  
Board of National Estimates

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